THE NEW DAY

BY RICHARD WATSON GILDER

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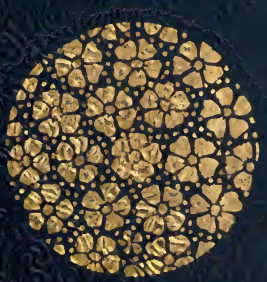

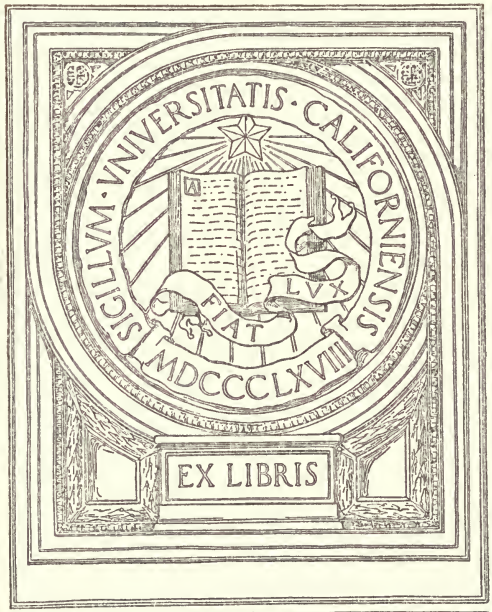
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THE NEW DAY,

A POEM IN SONGS AND SONNETS.

By R. W. GILDER

I. THE NEW DAY
II. THE CELESTIAL PASSION
III. LYRICS

THE NEW DAY
BY RICHARD WATSON GILDER

A POEM IN SONGS
AND SONNETS

FOURTH
EDITION

PUBLISHED BY THE
CENTURY CO. N. Y.

953
G468
new
1887

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The De Vinne Press.

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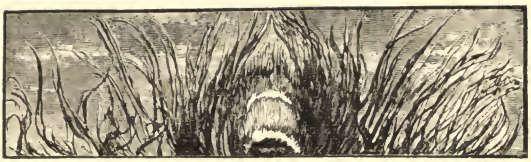
PRELUDE.



THE night was dark, though sometimes a faint star
A little while a little space made bright.
Dark was the night and like an iron bar
Lay heavy on the land: till o'er the sea
Slowly, within the East, there grew a light
Which half was starlight, and half seemed to be
The herald of a greater. The pale white
Turned slowly to pale rose, and up the height
Of heaven slowly climbed. The gray sea grew
Rose-colored like the sky. A white gull flew
Straight toward the utmost boundary of the East
Where slowly the rose gathered and increased.
It was as on the opening of a door
By one who in his hand a lamp doth hold,
(Its flame yet hidden by the garment's fold)—
The still air moves, the wide room is less dim.

More bright the East became, the ocean turned
Dark and more dark against the brightening sky—
Sharper against the sky the long sea line.
The hollows of the breakers on the shore
Were green like leaves whereon no sun doth shine,
Though white the outer branches of the tree.
From rose to red the level heaven burned;
Then sudden, as if a sword fell from on high,
A blade of gold flashed on the ocean's rim.

PART I.

I.

SONNET.

(AFTER THE ITALIAN.)

I KNOW not if I love her overmuch;
But this I know, that when unto her face
She lifts her hand, which rests there, still, a space,
Then slowly falls—'tis I who feel that touch.
And when she sudden shakes her head, with such
A look, I soon her secret meaning trace.
So when she runs I think 'tis I who race.
Like a poor cripple who has lost his crutch
I am if she is gone; and when she goes,
I know not why, for that is a strange art—
As if myself should from myself depart.
I know not if I love her more than those
Her lovers, but for just that half-blown rose
She covers in her hair, I 'd give my heart.

II.

SONNET.

(AFTER THE ITALIAN.)

I LIKE her gentle hand that sometimes strays,
To find the place, through the same book with mine;
I like her feet; and oh, her eyes are fine!
And when we say farewell, perhaps she stays
Love-lingering—then hurries on her ways,
As if she thought, "To end my pain and thine."
I like her voice better than new-made wine,
I like the mandolin whereon she plays.
And I like, too, the cloak I saw her wear,
And the red scarf that her white neck doth cover,
And well I like the door that she comes through;
I like the riband that doth bind her hair,—
But then, in truth, I am that lady's lover,
And every new day there is something new.

III.

"A BARREN STRETCH THAT SLANTS TO THE SALT SEA'S GRAY."

A BARREN stretch that slants to the salt sea's gray—
Rock-strewn, and scarred by fire, and rough with stubble,—
With here and there a bold, bright touch of color—
Berries and yellow leaves, that make the dolor
More dolorous still. Above, a sky of trouble.

But now a light is lifted in the air;
And though the sky is shadowed, fold on fold,
By clouds that have the lightnings in their hold,
That western gleam makes all the dim earth fair—
The sun shines forth and the gray sea is gold.

IV.

LOVE IN WONDER.

(A PICTURE.)

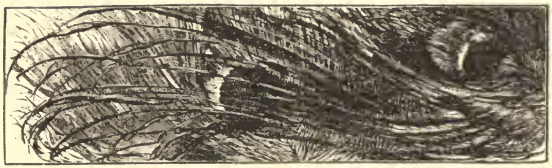
To-day I saw the picture of a man
Who, issuing from a wood, doth thrust apart
Strong-matted, thorny branches, whose keen smart
He heeds in nowise, if he only can
Win the red rose a maiden, like a fan,
Holds daintily. She, listening to her heart,
Hath looked another way. Ah, would she start,
And weep, and suffer sorrow, if he ran—
For utter love of her—swift, sobbing, back
Into those awful shadows, terribler
Because her whiteness made their black more black!
A little while he waits, lest he should err;
Awhile he wonders, secretly.—Alack!
He could so gladly die, or live for her.

V.

LOVE GROWN BOLD.

THIS is her picture painted ere mine eyes
Her ever holy face had looked upon.
She sitteth in a silence of her own;
Behind her, on the ground, a red rose lies:
Her thinking brow is bent, nor doth arise
Her gaze from that shut book whose word unknown
Her firm hands hide from her;—there all alone
She sitteth in thought-trouble, maidenwise.
And now her lover waiting wondereth
Whether the joy of joys is drawing near:
Shall his brave fingers like a tender breath
That shut book open for her, wide and clear?
From him who her sweet shadow worshippeth
Now will she take the rose, and hold it dear?

INTERLUDE.



THE sun rose swift and sent a golden gleam
Across the moving waters to the land;
Then for a little while it seemed to stand
In a clear place, midway 'twixt sea and cloud;
Whence rising swift again it passed behind
Full many a long and narrow cloud-wrought beam
Encased in gold unearthly, that was mined
From out the hollow caverns of the wind.
These first revealed its face and next did shroud,
While still the daylight grew, and joy thereby
Lit all the windy stretches of the sky:

Until a shadow darkened from the east
And sprang upon the ocean like a beast.

PART II.

I.

THERE was a field green and fragrant with grass and flowers, and flooded with sunlight, and the air above it throbbed with the songs of birds. It was yet morning when a sudden darkness spread over the earth, and out of the darkness lightning, and after the lightning fire that consumed every green thing; and the singing birds fell dying upon the blackened grass. The thunder and the flame passed, but it was still dark,— till a ray of light touched the field's edge and grew, little by little. Then I who listened heard — not the songs of birds again, but the flutter of broken wings.

II.

THE DARK ROOM.

(A PARABLE)

I.

A MAIDEN sought her love in a dark room,—
So early had she yearned from yearning sleep,
So hard it was from her true love to keep,—
And blind she went through that all-silent gloom,
Like one who wanders weeping in a tomb.
Heavy her heart, but her light fingers leap
With restless grasp and question in that deep
Unanswering void. Now when a hand did loom
At last, how swift her warm impassioned face
Pressed 'gainst the black and solemn-yielding air,
As near more near she groped to that bright place,
And seized the hand, and drowned it with her hair,
And bent her body to his fierce embrace,
And knew what joy was in the darkness there.

II.

GREAT GOD! the arms wherein that maiden fell
Were not her lover's; I am her lover—I,
Who sat here in the shadows silently—
Silent with gladness, for I thought, O hell!
I thought to me she moved, and all was well.
She saw me not, yet dimly could descry
That beautiful hand of his, and with a sigh
Sank on his fair and treacherous breast. The spell
Of the Evil One was on me. All in vain
I strove to speak—my parchéd lips were dumb.
See! see! the wan and whitening window-pane!
See, in the night, the awful morning bloom!
Too late she will know all! Heaven! send thy rain
Of death, nor let the sun of waking come!

III.

I MET A TRAVELLER ON THE ROAD.

I MET a traveller on the road
Whose back was bent beneath a load;
His face was worn with mortal care,
His frame beneath its burden shook,
Yet onward, restless, he did fare
With mien unyielding, fixed, a look
Set forward in the empty air
As if he read an unseen book.
What was it in his smile that stirred
My soul to pity! When I drew
More near it seemed as if I heard
The broken echo of a tune
Learned in some far and happy June.
His lips were parted, but unmoved
By words. He sang as dreamers do,
And not as if he heard and loved
The song he sang: I hear it now!

He stood beside the level brook,
Nor quenched his thirst, nor bathed his brow,
Nor from his back the burden shook.
He stood, and yet he did not rest;
His eyes climbed up in aimless quest,
Then close did to that mirror bow—
And, looking down, I saw in place
Of his, my own familiar face.

IV.

WRITTEN ON A FLY-LEAF OF "SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS."

When shall true love be love without alloy:
Shine free at last from sinful circumstance!
When shall the canker of unheavenly chance
Eat not the bud of that most heavenly joy!
When shall true love meet love not as a coy
Retreating light that leads a deathful dance,
But as a firm fixed fire that doth enhance
The beauty of all beauty! Will the employ
Of poets ever be too well to show
That mightiest love with sharpest pain doth writhe,
That underneath the fair, caressing glove
Hides evermore the iron hand; and though
Love's flower alone is good, if we would prove
Its perfect bloom, our breath slays like a scythe!

V.

"AND WERE THAT BEST!"

And were that best, Love, dreamless, endless sleep!
Gone all the fury of the mortal day;
The daylight gone, and gone the starry ray!
And were that best, Love, rest serene and deep!
Gone labor and desire; no arduous steep
To climb, no songs to sing, no prayers to pray,
No help for those who perish by the way,
No laughter 'midst our tears, no tears to weep!
And were that best, Love, sleep with no dear dream,
Nor memory of any thing in life—
Stark death that neither help nor hurt can know!
Oh, rather, Love, the sorrow-bringing gleam,
The living day's long agony and strife!
Rather strong love in pain—the waking woe!

VI.

"THERE IS NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN."

THERE is nothing new under the sun;
  There is no new hope or despair;
The agony just begun
  Is as old as the earth and the air.
My secret soul of bliss
  Is one with the singing star's,
And the ancient mountains miss
  No hurt that my being mars.

I know as I know my life,
  I know as I know my pain,
That there is no lonely strife,
  That he is mad who would gain
A separate balm for his woe,
  A single pity and cover:
The one great God I know
  Hears the same prayer over and over.

I know it because at the portal
  Of Heaven I bowed and cried,
And I said, "Was ever a mortal
  Thus crowned and crucified!
My praise thou hast made my blame;
  My best thou hast made my worst;
My good thou hast turned to shame;
  My drink is a flaming thirst."

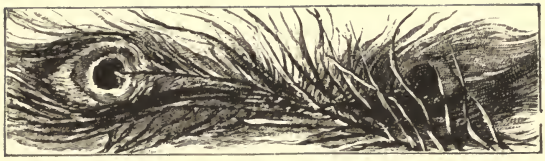
But scarce my prayer was said
  Ere from that place I turned;
I trembled, I hung my head,
  My cheek, shame-smitten, burned:
For there where I bowed down
  In my boastful agony,
I thought of thy cross and crown,—
  O Christ! I remembered thee.

VII.

LOVE'S CRUELTY.

"AND this, then, is thy love," I hear thee say,
"And dost thou love, and canst thou torture so?
Ah, spare me, if thou lov'st me, this last woe!"
But I am not my own; I must obey
My master; I am slave to LOVE; his sway
Is cruel as the grave. When he says Go!
I go; when he says Come! I come. I know
No law but his. When he says Slay! I slay.
As cruel as the grave? Yes—crueller.
Cruel as light that pours its stinging flood
Across the dark, and makes an anguished stir
Of life. Cruel as life that sends through blood
Of mortal the immortal pang and spur.
Cruel as thy remorseless maidenhood.

INTERLUDE.



THE cloud was thick that hid the sun from sight
And over all a shadowy roof outspread,
Making the day dim with another night—
Not dark like that which passed, but oh! more dread
For the clear sunlight that had gone before
And prophecy of that which yet should be.
Like snow at night the wind-blown hills of sand
Shone with an inward light far down the land:
Beneath the lowering sky black was the sea
Across whose waves a bird came flying low—
Borne swift on the wind with wing-beat halt and slow—
From out the dull east toward the foamy shore.
There was an awful waiting in the earth
As if a mystery greatened to its birth:
Though late it seemed, the day was just begun
When lo! at last, the many-colored bow
Stood in the heavens over against the sun.

PART III

I.

"MY LOVE FOR THEE DOTH MARCH LIKE ARMED MEN."

My love for thee doth march like arméd men
Against a queenly city they would take.
Along the army's front its banners shake;
Across the mountain and the sun-smit plain
It steadfast sweeps as sweeps the steadfast rain;
And now the trumpet makes the still air quake,
And now the thundering cannon doth awake
Echo on echo, echoing loud again.
But, lo! the conquest higher than bard had sung;
Instead of answering cannon comes a small
White flag; the iron gates are open flung,
And flowers along the invaders' pathway fall.
The city's conquerors feast their foes among,
And their brave flags are trophies on her wall.

II.

"I WILL BE BRAVE FOR THEE."

I WILL be brave for thee, dear heart; for thee
My boasted bravery forego. I will
For thee be wise, or lose my little skill,—
Coward or brave; wise, foolish; bond or free.
No grievous cost in anything I see
That brings thee bliss, or only keeps thee, still,
In painless peace. So Heaven thy cup but fill,
Be empty mine unto eternity!
Come to me, Love, and let me touch thy face!
Lean to me, Love,—breathe on me thy dear breath!
Fly from me, Love, to some far hiding-place,
If thy one thought of me or hindereth
Or hurteth thy sweet soul—then grant me grace
To be forgotten, though that grace be death!

III.

"LOVE ME NOT, LOVE, FOR THAT I FIRST LOVED THEE."

Love me not, Love, for that I first loved thee,
Nor love me, Love, for thy sweet pity's sake,
In knowledge of the mortal pain and ache
Which is the fruit of love's blood-veinéd tree.
Let others for my love give love to me:
From other souls, oh, gladly will I take,
This burning, heart-dry thirst of love to slake,
What seas of human pity there may be!
Nay, nay, I care no more how love may grow,
So that I hear thee answer to my call!
Love me because my piteous tears do flow,
Or that my love for thee did first befall.
Love me or late or early, fast or slow:
But love me, Love, for love is one and all!

IV.

BODY AND SOUL.

I.

O THOU my Love, love first my lonely soul!
Then shall this too unworthy body of mine
Be loved by right and accident divine.
Forget the flesh, that the pure spirit's goal
May be the spirit; let that stand the whole
Of what thou lov'st in me. So will the shine
Of soul that strikes on soul make fair and fine
This earthy tenement. Thou shalt extol
The inner, that the outer lovelier seem.
Remember well that thy true love doth fear
No deadlier foe than the impassioned dream
Should drive thee to him, and should hold thee near—
Near to the body, not the soul of him.
Love first my soul and then both will be dear.

II.

BUT, Love, for me thy body was the first.
One day I wandered idly through the town,
Then entered a cathedral's silence brown
Which sudden thrilled with a strange heavenly burst
Of light and music. Lo! that traveller durst
Do nothing now but worship and fall down.
He thought to rest, as doth some tired clown
Who sinks in longed-for sleep, but there immersed
Finds restless vision on vision of beauty rare.
Moved by thy body's outer majesty
I entered in thy silent, sacred shrine:
'Twas then, all suddenly and unaware,
Thou didst reveal, O maiden Love! to me,
This beautiful, singing, holy soul of thine.

V.

"THY LOVER, LOVE, WOULD HAVE SOME NOBLER WAY."

Thy lover, Love, would have some nobler way
To tell his love, his noble love to tell,
Than rhymes set ringing like a silver bell.
Oh, he would lead an army, great and gay,
From conquering to conquer, day by day!
And when the walls of a proud citadel
At summons of his guns loud-echoing fell,—
That thunder to his Love should murmuring say:
Thee only do I love, dear Love of mine!
And while men cried: Behold how brave a fight!
She should read well, oh well! each new emprise:
This to her lips, this to my lady's eyes!
And though the world were conquered, line on line,
Still would his love be speechless, day and night.

VI.

"WHAT WOULD I SAVE THEE FROM?"

WHAT would I save thee from, dear heart, dear heart?
Not from what Heaven may send thee of its pain;
Not from fierce sunshine or the scathing rain:
The pang of pleasure; passion's wound and smart;
Not from the scorn and sorrow of thine art;
Nor loss of faithful friends, nor any gain
Of growth by grief. I would not thee restrain
From needful death. But O, thou other part
Of me!—through whom the whole world I behold,
As through the blue I see the stars above!
In whom the world I find, hid fold on fold!
Thee would I save from this—nay, do not move!
Fear not, it may not flash, the air is cold;
Save thee from this—the lightning of my love.

VII.

LOVE'S JEALOUSY.

Of other men I know no jealousy,
Nor of the maid who holds thee close, oh close!
But of the June-red, summer-scented rose,
And of the orange-streakéd sunset sky
That wins the soul of thee through thy deep eye;
And of the breeze by thee beloved, that goes
O'er thy dear hair and brow; the song that flows
Into thy heart of hearts, where it may die.
I would I were one moment that sweet show
Of flower; or breeze beloved that toucheth all;
Or sky that through the summer eve doth burn.
I would I were the song thou lovest so,
At sound of me to have thine eyelid fall:
But I would then to something human turn.

VIII.

LOVE'S MONOTONE.

THOU art so used, Love, to thine own bird's song,—
Sung to thine ear in love's low monotone,
Sung to thee only, Love, to thee alone
Of all the listening world,—that I among
My doubts find this the leader of the throng:
Haply the music hath accustomed grown
And no more music is to thee; my own
Too faithful argument works its own wrong.
Ah Love, and must I learn for thy sweet sake
The art of silence! Shut from me the light
Of thy dear face then, lest the music wake!
Yet should thy bird at last fall silent quite,
Would not thy heart an unused sorrow take?
—Think not of me but of thyself to-night.

IX.

"ONCE ONLY."

Once only, Love, may love's sweet song be sung;
But once, Love, at our feet love's flower is flung;
Once, Love, once only, Love, can we be young:
Say shall we love, dear Love, or shall we hate!

Once only, Love, will burn the blood-red fire;
But once awakeneth the wild desire;
Love pleadeth long, but what if Love should tire!
Now shall we love, dear Love, or shall we wait!

The day is short, the evening cometh fast;
The time of choosing, Love, will soon be past;
The outer darkness falleth, Love, at last:
Love, let us love ere it be late,—too late!

X.

DENIAL.

When some new thought of love in me is born
Then swift I seek a token fair and meet
That may unblamed thy blessed vision greet;
Whether it be a rose, not bloodless torn
From that June tree which hideth many a thorn,
Or but a simple, loving message, sweet
With summer's heart and mine: these at thy feet
I straightway fling—but all with maiden scorn
Thou spurnest. What to thee is token or sign,
Who dost deny the thing wherefor it stands!
Then I seem foolish in my sight and thine,
Like one who eager proffers empty hands.
Thou only callest these my gifts unfine,
While men are praising them in distant lands.

XI.

"ONCE WHEN WE WALKED WITHIN A SUMMER FIELD."

ONCE when we walked within a summer field
I plucked the flower of immortality,
And said, "Dear Love of mine, I give to thee
This flower of flowers of all the round year's yield!"
'Twas then thou stood'st, and with one hand didst shield
Thy sun-dazed eyes, and, flinging the other free,
Spurned from thee that white blossom utterly.
But, Love! the immortal can not so be killed.
The generations shall behold thee stand
Against that western glow in grass dew-wet—
Lord of my life, and lady of the land.
Nor maid nor lover shall the world forget,
Nor that disdainful wafture of thy hand.
Thou scornful! sun and flower shall find thee yet.

XII.

SONG.

I LOVE her gentle forehead,
And I love her tender hair;
I love her cool, white arms,
And her neck where it is bare.

I love the smell of her garments;
I love the touch of her hands;
I love the sky above her,
And the very ground where she stands.

I love her doubting and anguish;
I love the love she withholds;
I love my love that loveth her
And anew her being moulds.

XIII.

LISTENING TO MUSIC.

WHEN on that joyful sea
Where billow on billow breaks; where swift waves follow
Waves, and hollow calls to hollow;
Where sea-birds swirl and swing.
And winds through the rigging shrill and sing;
Where night is one vast starless shade;
Where thy soul not afraid,
Though all alone unlonely,
Wanders and wavers, wavers wandering:—
On that accurséd sea
One moment only,
Forget one moment, Love, thy fierce content;
Back let thy soul be bent—
Think back, dear Love, O Love, think back to me!

XIV.

"A SONG OF THE MAIDEN MORN."

A SONG of the maiden morn,
A song for my little maid,
Of the silver sunlight born!

But I am afraid, afraid,
When I come my maid may be
Nothing, there, but a shade.

But oh, her shadow is more to me
Than the shadowless light of eternity!

XV.

WORDS IN ABSENCE.

I WOULD that my words were as my fingers,
So that my Love might feel them move
Slowly over her brow, as lingers
The sunset wind o'er the world of its love.
I would that my words were as the beating
Of her own heart, that keeps repeating
My name through the livelong day and the night;
And when my Love her lover misses—
Longs for and loves in the dark and the light—
I would that my words were as my kisses.
I would that my words her life might fill,
Be to her earth, and air, and skies.
I would that my words were hushed and still—
Lost in the light of her eyes.

XVI.

SONG.

THE birds were singing, the skies were gay:
I looked from the window on meadow and wood,
On green, green grass that the sun made white;
Beyond the river the mountain stood,—
Blue was the mountain, the river was bright:
I looked on the land and it was not good,
For my own dear Love she had flown away.

XVII.

THISTLE-DOWN.

Fly, thistle-down, fly
From my lips to the lips that I love!
Fly through the morning light,
Flee through the shadowy night,
Over the sea and the land,
Quick as the lark
Through twilight and dark,
Through lightning and thunder;
Till no longer asunder
We stand;
For thy touch like the lips of her lover
Moves her being to mine,—
We are one in a swoon divine!

Fly, thistle-down, fly
From my lips to the lips that I love!

XVIII.

"O SWEET WILD ROSES THAT BUD AND BLOW."

O SWEET wild roses that bud and blow
Along the way that my Love may go;
O moss-green rocks that touch her dress,
And grass that her dear feet may press;

O maple tree whose brooding shade
For her a summer tent has made;
O golden-rod and brave sun-flower
That flame before my maiden's bower;

O butterfly on whose light wings
The golden summer sunshine clings;
O birds that flit o'er wheat and wall,
And from cool hollows pipe and call;

O falling water whose distant roar
Sounds like the waves upon the shore;

O winds that down the valley sweep,
And lightnings from the clouds that leap;

O skies that bend above the hills,
O gentle rains and babbling rills,
O moon and sun that beam and burn—
Keep safe my Love till I return!

XIX.

THE RIVER.

I KNOW thou art not that brown mountain-side,
Nor the pale mist that lies along the hills
And with white joy the deepening valley fills;
Nor yet the solemn river moving wide
Into that valley, where the hills abide
But whence those morning clouds on noiseless wheels
Shall lingering lift and, as the moonlight steals
From out the heavens, so into the heavens shall glide.
I know thou art not this gray rock that looms
Above the water, fringed with scarlet vine;
Nor flame of burning meadow; nor the sedge
That sways and trembles at the river's edge.
But through all these, dear heart! to me there comes
Some melancholy, absent look of thine.

XX.

THE LOVER'S LORD AND MASTER.

I PRAY thee, dear, think not alone of me,
But think sometimes of my great master, LOVE;
His faithful slave he is so far above
That for his sake I would forgotten be,—
Though well I know that hidden thus from thee
Not far away my image then might rove,
And his sweet, heavenly countenance would move
Ever thy soul to gentler charity.
So when thy lover's self leaps from his song,
Thou him might love not less for his fair Lord.
But that thy love for me grow never small
(As bow long bent twangs not the arrowed cord,
And he doth lose his star who looks too long),
Sometimes, dear heart, think not of me at all.

XXI.

"A NIGHT OF STARS AND DREAMS."

A NIGHT of stars and dreams, of dreams and sleep;
A waking into another empty day—
But not unlovely all, for then I say,
"To-morrow!" Through the hours this light doth creep
Higher in the heavens, as down the heavenly steep
Sinks the slow sun. Another evening gray,
Made glorious by the morn that comes that way;
Another night, and then To-day doth leap
Upon the world! Oh quick the hours do fly,
Of that new day which brings the moment when
We meet at last! Swift up the shaking sky
Rushes the sun from out its dismal den;
And then the wished for time doth yearn more nigh,
A white robe glimmering in the dark—and then!

XXII.

A BIRTHDAY SONG.

I THOUGHT this day to bring to thee
A flower that grows on the red rose tree.
I searched the branches,—oh, despair!
Of roses every branch was bare.

I thought to sing thee a birthday song
As wild as my love, as deep and strong.
The song took wing like a frightened bird,
And its music my maiden never heard.

But, Love! the flower and the song divine
One day of the year shall yet be thine;
And thou shalt be glad when the rose I bring,
And weep for joy at the song I sing.

XXIII.

"WHAT CAN LOVE DO FOR THEE, LOVE?"

What can love do for thee, Love?
Can it make the green fields greener;
Bluer the skies, and bluer
The eyes of the blue-eyed flowers?
Can it make the May-day showers
More warm and sweet; serener
The heavens after the rain?
The sunset's radiant splendor
More exquisite and tender—
The Northern Star more sure?
Can it take the pang from pain?
(O Love! remember the curtain
Of cloud that lifted last night
And showed the silver light
Of a star!) Can it make more certain
The heart of the heart of all—

The good that works at the root—
The singing soul of love
That throbs in flower and fruit,
In man and earth and brute,
In hell, and heaven above?
Can its low voice musical
Make dear the day and the night?

XXIV.

"THE SMILE OF HER I LOVE."

The smile of her I love is like the dawn
Whose touch makes Memnon sing:
O see where wide the golden sunlight flows—
The barren desert blossoms as the rose!

The smile of her I love—when that is gone,
O'er all the world night spreads her shadowy wing.

XXV.

FRANCESCA AND PAOLO.

WITHIN the second dolorous circle where
The lost are whirled, lamenting — thou and I
Stood, Love, to-day with Dante. Silently
We looked upon the black and trembling air:
When lo! from out that darkness of despair
Two shadows light upon the wind drew nigh,
Whose very motion seemed to breathe a sigh:
And there Francesca, and her lover there.
These when we saw, the wounds whereat they bled,
Their love which was not with their bodies slain —
These when we saw, great were the tears we shed:
As, Love, for thee and me love's tears shall rain —
The mortal agony, the nameless dread;
The longing, and the passion, and the pain.

XXVI.

THE UNKNOWN WAY.

Two travellers met upon a plain
Where two straight, narrow pathways crossed;
They met and, with a still surprise,
They looked into each other's eyes
And knew that never, oh, never again!
Could one from the other soul be lost.

But lo! these narrow pathways lead
Now each from each apart, and lo!
In neither pathway can they go
Together, in their new, strange need.

Far-off the purple mountains loom—
Vague and far-off, and fixed as fate—
Which hide from sight that land unknown
Where, ever, like a carven stone
The setting sun doth stand and wait,

And men cry not, "Too late! too late!"
And sorrow turns to a golden gloom.

But oh, the long journey all unled
By track of traveller o'er the plain—
The stony desert, bleak and rude,
The bruiséd feet and the tired brain:
And oh, the two-fold solitude,
The doubt, the danger, and the dread!

XXVII.

THE SOWER.

I.

A Sower went forth to sow,
His eyes were dark with woe;
He crushed the flowers beneath his feet,
Nor smelt the perfume, warm and sweet,
That prayed for pity everywhere.
He came to a field that was harried
By iron, and to heaven laid bare:
He shook the seed that he carried
O'er that brown and bladeless place.
He shook it, as God shakes hail
Over a doomed land,
When lightnings interlace
The sky and the earth, and his wand
Of love is a thunder-flail.

Thus did that Sower sow;
His seed was human blood,
And tears of women and men.
And I, who near him stood,
Said: When the crop comes, then
There will be sobbing and sighing,
Weeping and wailing and crying,
Flame, and ashes, and woe.

II.

It was an autumn day
When next I went that way.
And what, think you, did I see,—
What was it that I heard,—
What music was in the air?
The song of a sweet-voiced bird?
Nay — but the songs of many,
Thrilled through with praise and prayer.
Of all those voices not any
Were sad of memory:
But a sea of sunlight flowed,
And a golden harvest glowed!

And I said: Thou only art wise—
God of the earth and skies!
And I thank thee, again and again,
For the Sower whose name is Pain.

XXVIII.

"WHEN THE LAST DOUBT IS DOUBTED."

When the last doubt is doubted,
The last black shadow flown;
When the last foe is routed;
When the night is over and gone:
Then, Love, oh then! there will be rest and peace:
Sweet peace and rest that never thou hast known.

When the hope that in thee moveth
Is born and brought to sight;
When past is the pain that proveth
The worth of thy new delight:
Oh then, Love! then there will be joy and peace:
Deep peace and joy, bright morning after night.

INTERLUDE.

AS melting snow leaves bare the mountain-side
In spaces that grow wider and more wide,
So melted from the sky the cloudy veil
That hid the face of sunrise. Land and ledge
And waste of glittering waters sent a glare
Back to the smiting sun. The trembling air
Lay, sea on sea, along the horizon's edge;
And on that upper ocean, clear as glass,
The tall ships followed with deep-mirrored sail
Like clouds wind-moved that follow and that pass;
And on that upper ocean, far and fair,
Floated low islands all unseen before.
Green grew the ocean shaken through with light,
And blue the heavens faint-flecked with plumy white.

Like pennants on the wind, from o'er the rocks
The birds whirled seaward in shrill-piping flocks:
And through the dawn, as through the shadowy night,
The sound of waves that break upon the shore!

PART IV.

I.

SONG.

LOVE, Love, my love,
The best things are the truest!
When the earth lies shadowy dark below
Oh then the heavens are bluest!
Deep the blue of the sky,
And sharp the gleam of the stars,
And oh, more bright against the night
The Aurora's crimson bars!

II.

THE MIRROR.

That I should love thee seemeth meet and wise,
So beautiful thou art that he were mad
Who in thy countenance no pleasure had;
Who felt not the still music of thine eyes
Fall on his forehead, as the evening skies
The music of the stars feel and are glad.
But o'er my mind one doubt still cast a shade
Till in my thoughts this answer did arise:
That thou shouldst love me is not wise or meet,
For like thee, Love, I am not beautiful;
And yet I think that haply in my face
Thou findest a true beauty — this poor, dull,
Disfigured mirror dimly may repeat
A little part of thy most heavenly grace.

III.

LIKENESS IN UNLIKENESS.

We are alike, and yet—oh strange and sweet!—
Each in the other difference discerns:
So the torn strands the maiden's finger turns
Opposing ways, when they again do meet
Clasp each in each, as flame clasps into heat;
So when my hand on my cool bosom burns,
Each sense is lost in the other. So two urns
Do, side by side, the self-same lines repeat,
But various color gives a lovelier grace,
And each by contrast still more fine has grown.
Thus, Love, it was, I did forget thy face
As more and more to me thy soul was known;
Vague in my mind it grew till, in its place,
Another came I knew not from my own.

IV.

SONG.

NOT from the whole wide world I chose thee—
Sweetheart, light of the land and the sea!
The wide, wide world could not inclose thee,
For thou art the whole wide world to me.

V.

ALL IN ONE.

Once when a maiden maidenly went by,
Or when I found some wonder in the grass,
Or when a purple sunset slow did pass,
Or a great star rushed silent through the sky;
Once when I heard a singing ecstasy,
Or saw the moon's face in the river's glass—
Then I remembered that for me, alas!
This beauty must for ever and ever die.
But now I may thus sorrow never more;
From fleeting beauty thou hast torn the pall,
For of all beauty, Love, thou art the core;
And though the empty shadow fading fall,—
Though lesser birds lift up their wings and soar,—
In having thee alone, Love, I have all.

VI.

"I COUNT MY TIME BY TIMES THAT I MEET THEE."

I COUNT my time by times that I meet thee;
These are my yesterdays, my morrows, noons
And nights; these my old moons and my new moons.
Slow fly the hours, or fast the hours do flee,
If thou art far from or art near to me:
If thou art far, the birds' tunes are no tunes;
If thou art near, the wintry days are Junes,—
Darkness is light, and sorrow cannot be.
Thou art my dream come true, and thou my dream,
The air I breathe, the world wherein I dwell;
My journey's end thou art, and thou the way;
Thou art what I would be, yet only seem;
Thou art my heaven and thou art my hell;
Thou art my ever-living judgment day.

VII.

SONG.

YEARS have flown since I knew thee first,
And I know thee as water is known of thirst:
Yet I knew thee of old at the first sweet sight,
And thou art strange to me, Love, to-night.

VIII.

THE SEASONS.

O STRANGE Spring days, when from the shivering ground
Love riseth, wakening from his dreamful swound
And, frightened, in the stream his face hath found!

O Summer days, when Love hath grown apace,
And feareth not to look upon Love's face,
And lightnings burn where earth and sky embrace!

O Autumn, when the winds are dank and dread,
How brave above the dying and the dead
The conqueror, Love, uplifts his banner red!

O Winter, when the earth lies white and chill!
Now only hath strong Love his perfect will
Whom heat, nor cold, nor death can bind nor kill.

IX.

"SUMMER'S RAIN AND WINTER'S SNOW."

Summer's rain and winter's snow
With the seasons come and go;
Shine and shower;
Tender bud and perfect flower;
Silver blossom, golden fruit;
Song and lute,
With their inward sound of pain:
Winter's snow and summer's rain;
Frost and fire;
Joy beyond the heart's desire,—
And our June comes round again.

X.

THE VIOLIN.

Before the listening world behold him stand,
The warm air trembles with his passionate play;
Their cheers shower round him like the ocean spray
Round one who waits upon the stormy strand.
Their smiles, sighs, tears all are at his command:
And now they hear the trump of judgment-day,
And now one silver note to heaven doth stray
And fluttering fall upon the golden sand.
But like the murmur of the distant sea
Their loud applause, and far off, faint and weak
Sounds his own music to him, wild and free—
Far from the soul of music that doth speak
In wordless wail and joyful ecstasy
From that good viol pressed against his cheek.

XI.

"O SILVER RIVER FLOWING TO THE SEA."

O SILVER river flowing to the sea,
Strong, calm, and solemn as thy mountains be!
Poets have sung thy ever-living power,
Thy wintry day, and summer sunset hour;
Have told how rich thou art, how broad, how deep;
What commerce thine, how many myriads reap
The harvest of thy waters. They have sung
Thy moony nights, when every shadow flung
From cliff or pine is peopled with dim ghosts
Of settlers, old-world fairies, or the hosts
Of savage warriors that once ploughed thy waves—
Now hurrying to the dance from hidden graves;
The waving outline of thy wooded mountains,
Thy populous towns that stretch from forest fountains
On either side, far to the salty main,
Like golden coins alternate on a chain.

Thou pathway of the empire of the North,
Thy praises through the earth have travelled forth!
I hear thee praised as one who hears the shout
That follows when a hero from the rout
Of battle issues, "Lo, how brave is he,—
How noble, proud, and beautiful!" But she
Who knows him best—"How tender!" So thou art
The river of love to me!
—Heart of my heart,
Dear love and bride—is it not so indeed?—
Among your treasures keep this new-plucked reed.

XII.

"MY SONGS ARE ALL OF THEE."

My songs are all of thee, what though I sing
Of morning when the stars are yet in sight,
Of evening, or the melancholy night,
Of birds that o'er the reddening waters wing;
Of song, of fire, of winds, or mists that cling
To mountain-tops, of winter all in white,
Of rivers that toward ocean take their flight,
Of summer when the rose is blossoming.
I think no thought that is not thine, no breath
Of life I breathe beyond thy sanctity;
Thou art the voice that silence uttereth,
And of all sound thou art the sense. From thee
The music of my song, and what it saith
Is but the beat of thy heart, throbbed through me.

XIII.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

DEAR heart, I would that after many days,
When we are gone, true lovers in a book
Might find these faithful songs of ours. "O look!"
I hear him murmur while he straightway lays
His finger on the page, and she doth raise
Her eyes to his. Then, like the winter brook
From whose young limbs a sudden summer shook
The fetters, love flows on in sunny ways.
I would that when we are no more, dear heart,
The world might hold thy unforgotten name
Inviolate in these still living rhymes.
I would have poets say, "Let not the art
Wherewith they loved be lost! To us the blame
Should love grow less in these our modern times."

XIV.

WEAL AND WOE.

O HIGHEST, strongest, sweetest woman-soul!
Thou holdest in the compass of thy grace
All the strange fate and passion of thy race;
Of the old, primal curse thou knowest the whole:
Thine eyes, too wise, are heavy with the dole,
The doubt, the dread of all this human maze;
Thou in the virgin morning of thy days
Hast felt the bitter waters o'er thee roll.
Yet thou knowest, too, the terrible delight,
The still content, and solemn ecstasy;
Whatever sharp, sweet bliss thy kind may know.
Thy spirit is deep for pleasure as for woe—
Deep as the rich, dark-caverned, awful sea
That the keen-winded, glimmering dawn makes white.

XV.

"OH, LOVE IS NOT A SUMMER MOOD."

I.

Oh, Love is not a summer mood,
  Nor flying phantom of the brain,
Nor youthful fever of the blood,
    Nor dream, nor fate, nor circumstance.
    Love is not born of blinded chance,
    Nor bred in simple ignorance.

II.

Love is the flower of maidenhood;
  Love is the fruit of mortal pain;
And she hath winter in her blood.
    True love is steadfast as the skies,
    And once alight she never flies;
    And love is strong, and love is wise.

XVI.

"LOVE IS NOT BOND TO ANY MAN."

I.

Love is not bond to any man,
Nor slave of woman, howso fair.
Love knows no architect nor plan:
She is a lawless wanderer,
She hath no master over her,
And loveth not her worshipper.

II.

But though she knoweth law nor plan—
Though she is free as light and air—
Love was a slave since time began.
Lo, now, behold a wondrous thing:
Though from stone walls she taketh wing
Love may be led by a silken string.

XVII.

"HE KNOWS NOT THE PATH OF DUTY."

He knows not the path of duty
  Who says that the way is sweet;
But he who is blind to the beauty,
  And finds but thorns for his feet.

He alone is the perfect giver
  Who swears that his gift is nought;
And he is the sure receiver
  Who gains what he never sought.

Heaven from the hopeless doubter
  The true believer makes:
Against the darkness outer
  The light God's likeness takes.

Like the pale, cold moon above her
  With its heart of the heart of fire,
My Love is the one true lover,
  And hers is the soul of desire.

AFTER-SONG.

AFTER-SONG.

THRÓUGH love to light! Oh wonderful the way
That leads from darkness to the perfect day!
From darkness and from sorrow of the night
To morning that comes singing o'er the sea.
Through love to light! Through light, O God, to thee,
Who art the love of love, the eternal light of light!

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